



# Women's Environment & Development Organization

## *Women: Essential to Climate Change Solutions*

Global warming is an established scientific fact. Humans contribute to it with our rising output of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and other products of fossil fuel consumption. So policies to halt global warming must address the human impacts as well as the technical side of the problem if they are to succeed. Women are essential to the solutions.

### **U.S. inaction against climate change is harming people at home and abroad.**

- The U.S. in 2001 rejected the Kyoto Protocol, the only legally binding international pact requiring cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and all other proposed emission cuts since then.
- The U.S., with only 6 percent of the global population, has been the largest contributor to climate change, producing the most greenhouse gases per capita in the world.
- Hotter weather is raising U.S. death rates among the very old and the very young and for those with heart and lung conditions. The cost: \$31 billion per year by 2100.<sup>i</sup>
- Warming seas are blamed for increasing the number and severity of tropical storms and hurricanes in the North Atlantic, and for changing patterns of drought and flood worldwide.
- Erratic weather causes ill health, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, forced migration and conflict over resources, leading to international tension and millions of deaths.
- Food emergencies in Africa, often from drought or flood, have risen three-fold every year since the mid-1980s.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Women are essential to any successful response to climate change.**

- With long experience in coping with environmental shifts, women produce 60 to 80 percent of the household food supply in most developing countries.<sup>iii</sup>
- Women carry water, gather wood for fuel, and manage household resources worldwide. They are also the chief caregivers for victims of weather-related and other natural disasters.
- A recent study in Sweden showed that women's carbon footprint is smaller than men's: they account for only 25 percent of car usage and only one-third own cars.<sup>iv</sup>
- During a drought in Micronesia, women sought and found a new source of potable water before government officials recognized them as key to the solution.
- In Kenya, where communities were suffering from a lack of natural resources, Wangari Maathai started the Greenbelt Movement to plant trees, replenishing resources and reducing vulnerability to climate change. Her movement spread worldwide.
- Acknowledging gendered divisions of labor, especially in the agriculture and informal sectors, is essential in drafting policy, not only to support the most vulnerable populations but also to enlist their knowledge.

### **Women are disproportionately affected worldwide by climate change.**

- The world's poor suffer most from erratic weather and its disruptions because they live in substandard housing in marginal land subject to drought or flood, or in crowded urban areas lacking essential services – and women are the majority of the world's poor.

- Of those killed in the 2004 Asian tsunami, up to 70 percent were women. In Bangladesh, the 1991 cyclone and flood killed 71 of every 1,000 women, compared to 15 of every 1,000 men<sup>v</sup>.
- In New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina drove poor women further into poverty and illness: they were forced into overcrowded living conditions, which raised the incidence of domestic abuse. Loss of child care facilities has cost many their jobs and health benefits.<sup>vi</sup>
- Discrimination means women worldwide are the first to lose their homes and their jobs after weather-related disasters, and the last to receive credit, technical help and education on energy and resource conservation.

**The new U.S. Congress will have a chance to restore U.S. leadership against global warming through comprehensive legislation.**

- Seventy-seven percent of Americans believe correctly that global warming is a serious threat.<sup>vii</sup>
- Talks begin in 2009 on the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol, and U.S. debate is underway on measures the new U.S. administration will propose and accept.
- Rep. Ed Markey of Massachusetts has introduced legislation, the Investing in Climate Action and Protection Act, or ICAP, that would slash U.S. greenhouse gas output by 85 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, and make polluters fully accountable for their emissions.
- ICAP would also invest in programs to lower the costs of climate policy for low- and middle-income households and spur development of advanced low-carbon technology and green energy.
- Technical solutions are not enough. Energy legislation must reflect the particular impact of climate change on women and their role as key agents in the U.S. and global response.
- Gender-specific data should guide discussions on the impact of climate change, possible policy remedies and their effects.
- Women, their advocates and gender experts must take part in the debate, and their recommendations must be heeded.

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*Founded in 1991, the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) is an international organization that advocates for women's equality in global policy. Working in key global forums such as the UN, WEDO advocates for and seeks to empower women as decision makers to achieve economic, social and gender justice, a healthy, peaceful planet and human rights for all.*

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<sup>i</sup> Deschenes, Olivier and Greenstone, Michael, "Climate Change, Mortality, and Adaptation: Evidence from Annual Fluctuations in Weather and Mortality," National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc. (NBER) Working Paper No. 13178, NBER, Cambridge June 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Oxfam, New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Working Group on Climate Change and Development: "Up in Smoke 2," NEF, London 2005

<sup>iii</sup> FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), "FAO focus: Women and Food Security", <<http://www.fao.org/focus/e/women/Sustin-e.htm>> Accessed 6/24/08.

<sup>iv</sup> WEDO, "Report of High Level Roundtable: How a Changing Climate Affects Women," New York, Sept. 21, 2007: presentation of Gerd Johnson-Latham, Deputy Director of Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, citing her own study

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<sup>v</sup> UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), 2005: "Mainstreaming Gender in Environmental Assessment and Early Warning," UNEP, Nairobi, 2005.

<sup>vi</sup> Jones-DeWeever, Avis., "Women in the Wake of the Storm: Examining the Post-Katrina Realities of the Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast," Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington DC, June 2007

<sup>vii</sup> Mellman, Mark, "Catching up on Global Warming" <<http://thehill.com/mark-mellman/catching-up-on-global-warming-2008-06-03.html>> Accessed 6/24/08